

Wabash Reflections



A Newsletter brought to you by the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission (WRHCC). Pardon our dust as we retool from a spate of recent computer changes – and with a new computer coming on line later this week, we're not out of the woods yet. Regardless, here are a few notes from around the Corridor. The New Year shows great promise; let's act NOW to make it so...

- ❖ Update on Parke County
- ❖ Curious Developments in Knox County
- ❖ Web link to Gibson County
- ❖ Notes and Quotes

Update on Parke County

Parke County has long been known as the COVERED BRIDGE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD. The county has just completed its forty-eighth annual fall festival which occurs for ten days in October and highlights the covered bridges. Approximately two million people descend upon small Parke County to view the remaining thirty-one of our original fifty-two and a half bridges, and enjoy the fall foliage and shopping for local handicrafts.

Parke County has a number of small streams that needed a way to cross each one. Thus our covered bridges became popular. Lumber was plentiful and the bridge floor lasted longer if it was covered and preserved from the elements. Two world famous bridge builders lived in Parke County and planned and oversaw the building of these structures. Sadly, arsonists have destroyed several of our bridges. A \$10,000 reward is still being offered to discover the most recent arson, the Jeffries Ford Bridge.



Parke County has become a good place for the Amish to come and build their homes after they are displaced by modernization of their home areas. Over eighty families have moved into the county and built their homes. They have excellent fresh produce, which they put on the market each summer and fall. Milk production and baked goods add to their income here. This has had a disastrous effect on the county and especially our three school systems, which are Riverton Parke, Rockville and Turkey Run. The schools have suffered from a loss of state aid funding as a result of the drop in attendance in the public schools. The Amish build their own schools and educate their own children.

Parke County has three state Parks. These are Raccoon Lake, Shades and Turkey Run. Raccoon Lake (Cecil Hardin Lake) is a water-holding structure that has become popular for boating, swimming and fishing,

Parke County has a total of thirteen townships. Starting at the north end of the county, these are Liberty, Sugar Creek, Howard, Penn, Reserve, Washington, Greene, Wabash, Union, Adams, Florida, Reserve and Jackson. Each township has a trustee and an advisory board. A salary is paid to each of these persons. Their duties are collecting dog taxes, maintaining a fire fighting fund for the township and overseeing the upkeep of cemeteries in their township. This presents a viable reason for the elimination of the office of township trustee and the advisory board. The school superintendents and the school boards now administer schools, which earlier were the task of the trustee.

The Wabash River makes up the west boundary of the county. The old Wabash-Erie Canal is visible in Montezuma. During the Covered Bridge Festival, tours are given to view this area and learn of its history. Sugar Creek travels across the county from the east empties into the Wabash River on the west.

One round barn still exists in the county. It is located east of Lodi. It was made famous when "Big Helen" murdered her boyfriend for his insurance. She threw his body to the hogs to eat, but they did not get rid of his body and she was arrested for his murder. She is still serving her prison term for his murder.

There is a stoned boat launch ramp on the Wabash on the Parke-Fountain County line. A young boy took his girlfriend out to the ramp and, when she refused his sexual advances, pushed her into the River where she drowned.

There are several Hoosier Homesteads in Parke County. These are homes that have been in the same family for at least one hundred years. Our home farm in Howard Township is a Hoosier Homestead Farm. Governor Bob Orr presented the award to my father. My grandfather purchased it after the Civil War. He was a Confederate and fought under General Robert E. Lee until the Battle of Gettysburg where he was wounded by a musket ball in the shoulder. Our sons were the fourth generation of Isaacs to reside on the original family farm acreage. Thus, we continue to own our home and reside in Parke County, a historic community.

John Isaacs, WRHCC Commissioner, Parke County

A "Thumbnail" on Parke County may be found at: <http://www.in.gov/mylocal/counties/parke/>

Curious Developments in Knox County

In Knox County we are always busy planning and exploring new ways to enhance our communities and recreational opportunities. Of specific interest is the current planning and development of the Vincennes Riverfront Project.

This outstanding development will begin at the George Rogers Clark National Historic Park and would comprise four phases reaching the Ouabache (Wabash) Trails County Park two miles north of Vincennes. The City of Vincennes has already received a \$1,000,000.00 grant from the Indiana Department of Transportation for the development of phase 1, which is to be completed by late 2006.



The basic concept will be that of a multi-use trail way (10 feet wide) with various riverfront facilities and combined with a natural green space effect. "This special project has comprised the cooperative work and efforts of many at the city, county, state, and federal level". "Upon its completion it should be a magnificent compliment to the Wabash River and the recreational benefits of our communities and visitors."

Tracy R. Newberry, WRHCC Commissioner, Knox County & Superintendent, Knox County Parks

Knox County's thumbnail information is at: <http://www.in.gov/mylocal/counties/knox/>

Update on Gibson County

In lieu of an article from Gibson County, I would just note that they have a nice website at <http://www.gibsoncountyin.org/home.html> (providing such historical information as that the county seat, Princeton, was named after a Commissioner who won the naming rights by the drawing of lots) and that a portion of the Wabash and Erie Canal is still visible in the eastern part of the County. Upcoming events (at their fairgrounds) include a regional antique tractor pull (February 27 – 29) and Dog Agility Trials on March 6.

Statistical information may be found at: <http://www.in.gov/mylocal/counties/gibson/>

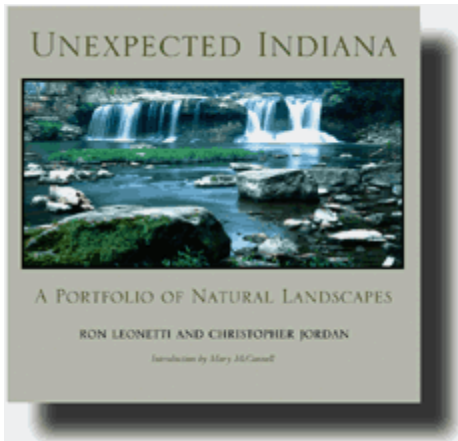
Notes & Quotes (from Executive Director Ron James)

I'll be giving a brief presentation to the Bluffton (Wells County) Rotary Club on the 18th of January. Anyone else who needs a speaker on the subject near and dear to all our hearts (i.e. anything Wabash River) please feel free to call.

Gary Harrison, our main contact for our planned video development needs to be notified in advance of any action in your area of the river. Given the current weather, it'd be great to have a little footage of the flooding for our Wabash documentary...either stuff that's been shot by the local news stations...or maybe WFYI could hustle one of their photographers to a prime location and get some good footage themselves. Feel free to call Gary, or talk to Sara Beanblossom, who is helping, too. (317) 902-8765.



I plan on attending the February 1 “Conservation Day” at the Statehouse - for those interested, check out the Nature Conservancy site (Indiana Chapter and the Conservancy Alliance is the sponsor): <http://nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/indiana/> and look for their write-up about two stories down. This may be an excellent opportunity to learn more “how to” in lobbying but will not take the place of our need to get our Commission’s specific message out to our legislators.



I have the book “Unexpected Indiana” now in my library (ask and ye shall see). It is an inspiring collection of photographs. So inspiring, I’d like to start a collection of everyone’s favorite Wabash River photos and, with permission of the contributors, suggest we could put together an annual Wabash River calendar which could be used as a fund raising tool in our counties. If you’ll start sending me your quality digital photos, or if you have prints that will scan well, let me know and I’ll get a “release” prepared. First edition, 2006?

Have a great winter. Ron James